

Richard Morrissey—A216398—Mechanical Transport Fitter

An interesting story on how I happened to join the RAAF.

Just as I was completing my NSW Intermediate exams my parents separated. I was fourteen years old at the time. As my parents were Catholics I realised I could not go back to school so I left home and obtained employment as a bellboy in the Hotel Australia, Castlereagh Street, Sydney.

After I had been employed there for several months I noticed the RAAF Apprentice advertisement in the papers in 1953, so I applied to enlist. The response was “NO”, go back to school and try again next year. This was impossible as I had to pay board and completely look after myself.

Luckily I happened to run into a good friend and ex-neighbour from Bondi, Brian Thompson. Brian was about nine months older than I and it so happened that he had also applied to enlist in the RAAF Apprenticeship scheme and had been accepted.

Brian advised me of the time and place of the interview, so we decided we would both turn up and pretend we did not know each other. After completing the medical, physical and mental tests the individual interviews were started and finished. And I was left sitting there. The panel asked me what was I doing there. I managed to convince them that they must have sent me the wrong letter otherwise I would not have known about the interview and I had forfeited a day's pay. Hence they decided that since I had passed all the tests with flying colours they would continue with my application.

Bad move; the RAAF had to put up with me for the next fifteen years!

RSTT

I joined the RAAF Apprenticeship scheme in January 1954 when I was fifteen years and six months old. This intake is known as the Mighty Mangoes.

During the first year I joined the Boffin Flight. The purpose was to attend Wagga Technical College at night to complete the NSW Leaving Certificate. We were advised that after two years the top five would automatically be accepted into the RAAF Academy, Point Cook, Victoria for pilot training and to study for an engineering degree.

In the first year I received a trophy for the best and fairest in the Reds under-eighteen years rugby union team and although I was only sixteen at the time, it was my first year playing rugby union. At the end of the year I was promoted to corporal apprentice.

At the end of our second year we completed the NSW Leaving Certificate with the top five Boffins being in order: Baillie McKenny; Brian Thompson; John O'Callaghan; myself; and Alan Perry.

On the morning of our expected departure to Point Cook, Alan Perry and I were in the ironing room when we were told that since the Korean War had ended, the Australian Government decided to reduce Defence spending, consequently only the top three would be going to Point Cook; Alan and I were the two to miss out.

During the second year I was selected to represent the RAAF Riverina district, boxing against the Army Riverina district boxing champion from Kapooka and won my bout by a knockout in the second round.

At the beginning of the third year I was promoted to sergeant apprentice. Being somewhat upset by missing out on going to the RAAF Academy, I started drinking alcohol, going to the local dances and getting into the odd punch up.

One Monday morning in March 1956, I was intercepted going to classes by the officer in charge of boxing (Flight Lieutenant “Bronco” Johnston) who asked, “Why aren't you at RAAF Richmond?”

Apparently I had been nominated to try out for representing the RAAF in the Australian inter-service boxing championships. He ordered me to go and get my gear together while he arranged transport for me to Sydney.

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On arriving at RAAF Richmond on the Tuesday I was accused of being AWL and to report to the guardhouse. After convincing the authorities to phone Flight Lieutenant Johnston, I was allowed to go to the gymnasium and join the other boxers. I was then told I had five days to lose seven pounds to achieve my fighting weight division, lightweight (nine-stone, seven pounds) and obtain maximum fitness. I had not undertaken any fitness training since the end of the previous football season.

After losing seven pounds weight by the following Monday, I had three bouts. The first bout was against a chap from Townsville, the second against the person who represented the RAAF in 1955, and the third was a fellow who fought with the Jimmy Sharman boxing troop when available. Fortunately I defeated the three opponents within two rounds, as I doubted, fitness wise, that I could have lasted the three rounds.

The following week I fought the Australian Army champion by the name of Thomas Steele in Sydney Stadium at Rushcutters Bay. He was somewhat taller than I and in the second round he caught me with a solid punch which stunned me and then caught me with another punch which luckily un-stunned me. I thought to myself, The mongrel hit me while I wasn't ready, so I whacked him with a flurry of punches which floored him. The referee had moved in to give me a compulsory standing eight count after the first punch that stunned me, looked at me then looked at the Army chap flat on his back, half under the ropes on the other side of the ring, again looked at me, looked at the Army fellow then went over and started to count him out. Realising after counting five or six that my opponent was completely out to it, the referee removed the mouth guard, checked vital signs, then raised my hand, declaring me the winner. My next opponent was Titch Boxwell the Navy champion. He had the benefit of watching my fight against the Army representative so he and his trainer, knowing how powerful my punches were, decided to employ hit and run tactics. I was defeated on a split points decision.

On returning to Wagga after four weeks at Richmond, Squadron Leader Staines (the education officer) approached me and advised that he had started a class for those who had missed out on qualifying for Point Cook Academy to obtain the Victorian Matriculation and thus qualify to attend Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology for three years to obtain a diploma of engineering. Although I had missed four weeks of trade training and three weeks of the matriculation course, I managed to catch up. Squadron Leader Staines was an exceedingly good teacher who benefited us in obtaining very high marks. So high were our marks, RMIT sent two of their examiners to our base to check our yearly work books and were thoroughly convinced that no cheating had been involved.

We arrived at RAAF Laverton, our home base, to attend RMIT classes early in 1957. We became known as Number 2 Diploma Course. Number 1 course consisted of ex-Apprentices from 4, 5 and 6 intakes. Number 2 Diploma Course consisted of ex-Apprentices from 7 and 8 intakes.

At the end of the first year I was the only one from our group who passed all subjects without having to submit to supplementary exams. Although I passed all subjects my average marks were below the average marks of the other guys on the course who only had to re-sit one or two supps. The rest of the personnel at RAAF Laverton were jealous that the diploma students were receiving preferential treatment. They considered that we were going to school, not doing manual labour and still obtaining full tradesmen's wages. They did not take into account that at the same time at Wagga we were not only learning our trades, we attended night school four nights a week and were transported in the back of a four-ton truck in summer and winter. At Laverton we were transported to RMIT five days a week early in the morning and returning late in the day in the back of a four-ton truck, summer and winter. We had to endure the delays at Swing Bridge, Footscray and the evil pungent smells going past the dump. We would arrive back at Laverton after the evening meal was finished and

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we had to put up with the leftovers or go without.

I believe I was used as a scapegoat and since I was the only one not required to sit for a supplementary exam I was rewarded by being posted to the base transport section for the next six to eight weeks while the rest of the course studied in the library, not only to study for their supps which they sat for after about three to four weeks and then used the next couple of weeks preparing for the oncoming year. I will never be able to understand why they were not posted to work in their assigned trades on the base or why I was not allowed to join them for this extra study they received. (Grapes more sour).

The ironic feature during 1957 was that although I was refused my application to the RAAF Academy I played rugby union for them under their banner in the Melbourne rugby union competition. The Academy had earned promotion to play in the reserve grade competition but looked like being relegated. Apparently they heard that I was better than an average player and approached me to register in their team. I complied and was the only ever non-student to represent them in the rugby competition. Result, they were not relegated.

In 1958 Barry Holloway from No 1 Diploma Course managed to have RAAF Laverton registered in third-grade in the Melbourne competition. This team mainly consisted of members of the diploma courses and Barry Jacka from No 8 ex-Apprentices, two RAF pilots attached to ARDU Laverton and a close friend and RAAF chef assigned to Laverton by the name of Max Greedy - aptly named for that mustering, don't you think?

Citizens of Geelong, Victoria also wanted to join the Melbourne Rugby Union Competition and requested our team to play a composite team from Geelong at Geelong. Our team had been playing at second-grade venues on grounds with cement cricket pitches in the centre. Most of our team had had a fair amount of skin missing from our bodies. Unbeknown to us the oval we were to play on had the grass mown by having a flock of sheep running over it and leaving excretion all over the oval. I finished up in RAAF Laverton for the next seven weeks with a severe case of impetigo.

Whilst I was in hospital a couple of WRAAFs, including Patricia Knersch, occasionally visited another patient in the adjoining bed. We became friends and often met in the canteen on Monday nights, after panic night, and played table tennis together.

After my discharge from base hospital I arranged an interview with Wing Commander Lavers (our OIC) and asked if I could spend the rest of the year working in my trade and repeat my second year full-time the following year as I knew I had missed too many lessons to successfully complete the second year of the diploma course. He replied that I should continue the course and try and to pass as many subjects as possible and a decision would be made next year. I felt that I would receive a favourable outcome as he was also the officer in charge of rugby union and I was one of his stars. Unfortunately he was posted away to another unit and was replaced by Pilot Officer Halverson, straight out of rookie training and who wanted to impress his superiors. At the end of the year I managed to pass most of the subjects, but failed three or four and was consequently tossed off the course.

A short story

On my first attachment to RAAF Ubon in Thailand in 1964, I was issued with a SLR rifle. As I started to walk away I was called back and was told that since my records showed I was classified as a marksman in the firing of a Bren gun, I was also issued with a Bren gun along with an extra two loaded magazines in a knapsack.

Rewind back to 1955. As sixteen/seventeen-year-old RAAF Apprentices we were taught how to handle and fire a variety of weapons. On this day it was the Bren gun. Seventeen of us were lined up on the rifle range on the four hundred-yard mound wearing full webbing and combat gear including ill-fitting tin hats. The man-size targets were numbered, but the numbers were between the targets and not directly behind the targets. There were seventeen of us and my target was number sixteen. We had to fire a volley of rounds in the prone

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position then run to the hundred yards to the next mound, fire from a kneeling position, then another hundred yards firing from sitting position, then another hundred yards and fire from a standing position. At the end of this exhausting exercise the lad at number seventeen position asked me, “Which target were you aiming at?” I replied that I had been firing at the target situated between numbers sixteen and seventeen. The other lad said, “I think I was firing at that one also.” Hence I received a score of marksman and had to carry a bloody Bren gun and extra magazines as well as my SLR everywhere I went every time the base was put on orange alert.

Back to my Story

December 1967 my last posting in the RAAF was to Amberley, Queensland to prepare for the introduction of the new F111 fighter / bombers into the Australian defence force. Unfortunately these aircraft did not arrive till 1972.

By the end of my enlistment, I had a house built at Jindalee, just west of Brisbane. My first employment after leaving the RAAF was as maintenance foreman at Tip Top Bakeries, Taringa. After fifteen months I had returned all their vehicles to top condition. My wife and I had been accepted as adoptive parents and I did not wish to be nursing a new born baby with grease under my finger nails and smelling of oil and grease so I decided to change my profession. I took a job as a sales representative selling truck bull bars, air filters, hoists and tip bodies, truck mounted cranes etc.

I had been playing squash for Milton tennis association and the other three members of my team worked for Leyland Truck and Bus and they convinced me to accept a position in sales with them. I started in internal sales then became sales engineer and then by 1974 I was production and new vehicle manager of trucks, buses, tractors, Land Rover and Range Rover. By 1977 I was made Queensland spare parts manager for these vehicles as well as Daihatsu trucks and four wheel drives. By 1980 I was out on the road again calling on dealerships selling these vehicles plus Jaguar and Rover and Peugeot cars ranging from Grafton in NSW to Brisbane.

I was later switched to calling on the dealerships from Brisbane to Rockhampton. By 1985 I was area manager for Jaguar, Rover and Peugeot cars and Range Rover and Land Rover four wheel drives from Grafton to Rockhampton.

In 1987 the Button and Keating idiotic strategy of increasing the sales tax on luxury vehicles from twenty to thirty per cent sent the sales tumbling. People holding the same position as me in every state were made redundant in July of that year. It could only get worse and in September the Wall Street crash saw me lose a large amount of money as I had invested my superannuation and long service payments.

Having travelled most of eastern Australia I came to the conclusion that the Sunshine Coast is one of the nicest places to live, so I upped stakes and moved to Mooloolaba. No business wanted to hire a 50 year old so I finished up buying a fibreglass business which made mouldings and sold fibreglass roofing. I closed down the manufacturing side of the business and concentrated on increasing the sales of the roofing material. I built the business up to such an extent that my supplier wanted to buy me out. We agreed to the sale with me staying on as manager on a set wage. This continued till 1998 when I retired. In 1977-78 I was honorary secretary of Jindalee Bowls Club then went on to be junior vice, senior vice and then president in 1981. In 1998-99-2000 I was honorary treasurer Mooloolaba Bowls Club.

Dick Morrissey.

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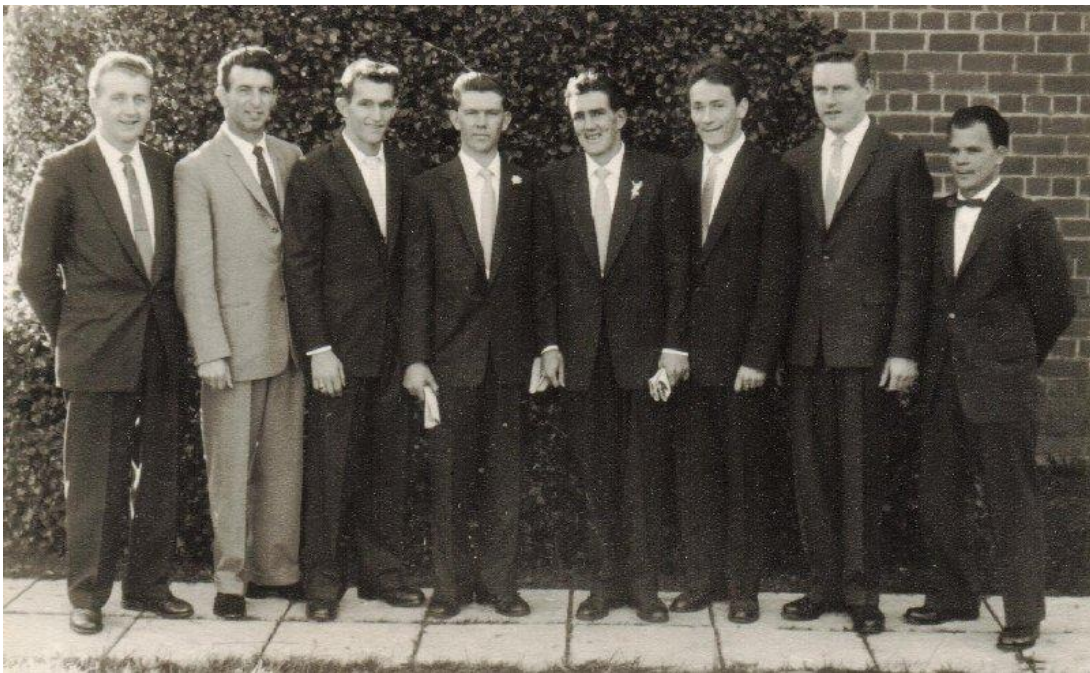
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Carylon's Hotel, Melbourne 1955 L to R : Nixon, Guy, Thompson and me.



Wedding day L to R : Mackay, Davidson R, Greedy M, Boyd, me, Bunn, McDougal and Humphries R. (Non Mangoes).